

Sermon on Matthew's Genealogy, Matthew 1:1-17  
Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009

This list we have just read is what's called a "genealogy." Actually our word "genealogy" comes from the same Greek word that is used here. A genealogy is a list that shows who our parents were, and then grandparents, and then the list keeps going back to their parents and the parents before them, and on and on it goes. That is what a genealogy is. But what is a genealogy for? And why would a genealogy be important? Well, the short answer is that we believe that all the Bible is inspired by God and all of it is profitable for us to read and hear, and this list is in the Bible. Evidently God considers it important. *But I need to warn you that there is a bit more teaching than usual to today's message before I really get to preaching. In other words, there are some things you have to understand before we can apply this text.*

For many people, when they read lists like this, it may seem boring, and they hurry through the list or skip over it, and you may even wonder why I'm talking about such a list this morning. A genealogy can be interesting, and it can be important. A genealogy can be interesting if you know who the people were, and know something about them. My cousin sent us a family genealogy that goes back 1600 years to an ancestor who played a notorious role in Church history. I had heard of this event, but had not known the perpetrator was my ancestor. For some time I also had known that one of my uncles was named for a great twentieth century statesman. But I just recently learned that he was also a direct descendant of one of my favorite composers. (And he also was a professional wrestler!) One of the elders at the first church where I was pastor, we discovered, was a direct descendant of Johann Sebastian Bach. I don't know about you, but things like that are interesting to me.

Sometimes a genealogy is important, because it's more than a story about origins and ancestors. **There are rights and privileges that a person may have only if he or she has the right pedigree.** Oliver Cromwell got control of England, as a dictator, when his armies triumphed and Charles I was in his hands, in prison. But Cromwell was not descended from the royal family of England, the Stewarts; and the people of England were not willing to accept Cromwell or his son as kings. Bloodline credentials matter wherever there is a hereditary kingship. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is important because it showed that He is the rightful heir to the throne of Israel. Now I should mention one thing before going further, Most of you will remember that in the following section Matthew tells the story of Jesus' birth, and in that telling he shows that God was Jesus' actual father. Joseph is Jesus' LEGAL father. Now, as I was saying, Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is important because it showed that He is the rightful heir to the throne of Israel.

Children, that means this list of people, beginning with Judah, the great grandson of Abraham, and ending with Joseph, Jesus' LEGAL father, shows that Jesus should be the King over all of Israel. And when God long ago promised King David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne, He also promised two other things: He would be on that throne, King, FOREVER, and He would be King, not just of Israel, but of the whole world!! WHEN WE SAY HE IS THE RIGHTFUL KING OF ISRAEL, IT MEANS HE IS RIGHTFULLY KING OVER THE WHOLE WORLD. Let me point you to one other thing. When Matthew says "the Son of Abraham" in the very first verse, what that means, is, "THE ONE WHO WOULD BE BORN TO BE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD." EVEN YOU YOUNG CHILDREN SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS MUCH THAT IS WRONG WITH THE WORLD, AND THAT IS BECAUSE YOU AND I ARE WRONG—WE ARE SEPARATED FROM GOD. THE BIBLE EVEN SAYS that until God

changes our hearts, WE ALL TREAT GOD AS AN ENEMY. BUT GOD SENT JESUS TO BE BORN INTO THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM, INTO THE FAMILY OF DAVID, TO BE OUR KING AND SAVIOR. WHETHER OR NOT YOU KNOW HIM, WHETHER OR NOT YOU ACCEPT HIM AS YOUR KING, WILL MATTER FOR ALL ETERNITY. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS KING, YOUR KING? LISTEN, AND I WILL SHOW YOU WHY HE IS AND MUST BE YOUR KING.

Matthew's opening words—the very first verse—are like a chapter heading in a book. He begins by saying, in effect, “we'll start by showing you that Jesus is the heir of the throne of Israel,” but the title even goes beyond that, and asserts that Jesus is not just David's heir—he is also the Savior of the world. That is what he means in calling Jesus “Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” A first century Jew would have known what those words meant, and would probably have thought of three things in being exposed to this list. **First**, there had not been an Israelite ruling Israel as king for over 600 years. But (**second**), when God established the monarchy in Israel some thousand years earlier, he promised King David that one of his descendants would not only be king, but would be king forever. Over time the prophets of Israel added to that picture. DAVID'S HEIR WOULD BRING SALVATION AND DELIVERANCE FOR ISRAEL. Then, **third**, the words “Son of Abraham” would have drawn up other memories. Some 1800 years earlier Israel's God had promised Abraham, the ancestor of all Israel, that someday one of his descendants would be bring blessing—salvation, to all the peoples of the world. And Matthew, in his introduction, is saying, “Jesus is the promised King, and Jesus is the promised descendant of Abraham, the Savior through whom God would bless the world.” Matthew's opening words were saying that finally, 1800 years after Abraham and 1000 years after David, after some 600 years of humiliation and hardship under the domination of foreign powers, the Deliver had come, and God was establishing His kingdom on earth.

You and I can hardly imagine what this would have meant to a first century Jew, if it was true. You might even say that being a Jew meant you had this hope, and you lived for this hope that God would keep these promises. For more than 6 centuries Israel had been subject to foreign occupation and foreign oppression. Taxes were high, and life was hard. The occupying soldiers despised Israel's God and Israel's religious customs. But it was those customs, and Israel's worship that kept the hope alive that one day Israel's God would send a Redeemer, a Deliver who would rescue them from oppression and slavery. **WHAT MATTHEW WAS SAYING WAS THAT THE THING ISRAEL HAD HOPED AND LONGED FOR, FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS, HAD FINALLY HAPPENED—AND WAS STILL HAPPENING. BUT, OF COURSE, IT DIDN'T LOOK QUITE LIKE THEY THOUGHT IT WOULD LOOK.** So any Jew would wonder, **“is this really true?”** How can I know for sure? Matthew anticipates those questions, and he begins to answer them with the genealogy —to demonstrate that Jesus is the lawful heir of David, and thus He is rightfully the King over Israel.

My purpose this morning is to show you the significance of the genealogy and this opening section of Matthew as a whole. But in order to do that I will have to point out a few things about the genealogy itself. Once I've done that we will draw out some conclusions, and then we'll see what those things mean for you and me. So bear with me in the details for a minute or two.

**First, this is not an ordinary genealogy. Matthew traces the ancestry of Israel's kings and the succession of Israel's throne.** Many of you will remember that in Luke's Gospel there is also a genealogy of Jesus. You may have heard that Luke gives us the family tree for Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Matthew the family tree for Joseph. It is most unlikely that that is true, because genealogies in ancient Israel were always traced through fathers, and there is nothing in Luke that indicates he was giving Mary's ancestry. From all we can tell, Luke was tracing Joseph's actual ancestry, because JOSEPH WAS JESUS LEGAL FATHER. Matthew traces Joseph's line, too, but he is doing something different. It is not always a father to son list. What Matthew was doing is tracing the kingship. When a king died without a son, usually a brother or nephew would become king. And there are parts of this genealogy where that is the case. It is not at every point a matter of direct blood descent. Matthew is tracing the right to be Israel's king. WE COULD CALL THIS A THRONE SUCCESSION LIST.

**Second, you will notice that there is a great deal of repetition in the words that Matthew uses, but we need to understand what the key verb means.** Matthew uses the same Greek verb over and over. If A is the father and B is the son, in the old English of the King James bible, it reads, "A begot B." In the NASV it reads, "B was born to A." In the ESV it reads, "A was the father of B." But in keeping with what I said a moment ago, sometimes B is a brother or nephew, and not a son. Sometimes the word means "A is the ancestor of B." Matthew skipped over 3 kings in verse 8, so it has to mean that there, and the likelihood is that there are other names that have been left out. The genealogy stretches over 1800 years with only 42 generations. But my second point, again, is that Matthew uses language that is very much a formula, and very repetitive.

**Third, given that Matthew is giving much of what he says by using a formula, that makes it so that anything that departs from the formula sticks out., and there are several things in these verses that do stick out.** In some cases that is simply because Matthew is quoting directly from his source in First Chronicles. For instance, Matthew tells us about a woman, Tamar, who was the mother of twins, Perez and Zerah. You can find the story in Genesis 38. The list in 1 Chronicles gives both of the twins and the mother, and Matthew lifted the names from the list. On the other hand, the 5 women he mentions here are all significant in some ways. There are other things that stick out. When Matthew mentions Judah, he also says, **"and his brothers."** That is significant because it puts the ancestor of Israel's kings in the context of a family—all Israel is descended either from Judah or one of his brothers, and the mention of these brothers would serve as a reminder of Israel's beginnings. Then when he gets to David in the list, he doesn't just say, David." It is **"David the King."** The rise of the monarchy is a huge thing in Israel's history. Then when he gets to King Jeconiah, he uses as a time marker, the words, **"the deportation to Babylon."** And having ended one sentence with that phrase he repeats it at the beginning of the next sentence. The Babylonian conquest of Israel was a HUGE TURNING POINT IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY. So together these things are very very brief ways of reminding the reader of Israel's beginnings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of the rise of Israel's monarchy in the house of David, and of the national catastrophe of the Babylonian conquest, whose effects had continued for 600 years. THESE LITTLE POINTS STICKING OUT GIVE THE SUGGESTION OF AN OUTLINE OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY. AND THE UPSHOT IS THAT WHEN MATTHEW COMES TO JOSEPH, MARY AND JESUS, HE IS SAYING, **THIS BIRTH, THIS MAN JESUS IS THE CLIMAX, THE CULMINATION OF THAT 1800 YEAR HISTORY.** IF JESUS IS THE KING WHO WILL RULE ISRAEL FOREVER, THERE IS NO ONE TO BE

ADDED.

**Finally, Matthew adds to that idea of climax in the final sentence in which he draws attention to the arrangement of the list in 3 blocks of 14.** Some people have thought that he does this because in Jewish numerology the value of the letters of the name of David adds up to 14. Some people have thought that Matthew speaks of 14 because it is 2 X 7, and 7 in biblical numerology is definitely associated with perfection. Those things are possible, but not likely. Any Jew of that time would have known that Matthew's list left some names out and would have known that when Matthew says, "all the generations," he meant, "all the generations in this list, this table." **And the net effect of dividing it into 3 blocks is to highlight the central block of those three blocks.** That center block is a list of the actual kings of Israel before it was divided, and of Judah after the division, that is, the heirs to David's throne. So the EMPHASIS IS ALL ON KINGSHIP. AND THE MESSAGE OF THE OPENING VERSE & THE GENEALOGY IS THIS:

***JESUS IS THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF ISRAEL'S THRONE, AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD PROMISED TO ABRAHAM.***

Let me translate that to show you better how this relates to you:

A succession genealogy, a royal pedigree is all about LEGITIMACY. Let's put it another way. In at least one respect THESE ARE JESUS CREDENTIALS. He has other credentials, but these are ESSENTIAL CREDENTIALS.

Next, what does Jesus being Israel's King have to do with you? Simply this: In the Old Testament it not only says that the Son of David would reign forever, but also that He would rule the whole world, that God's Kingdom on Earth would be governed by Him. **JESUS HAS THE CREDENTIALS TO BE YOUR KING.**

But we need to go back to "seed of Abraham" to complete the thought. The Abraham story in the Old Testament is set against the dark background of a human race that is separated from God, which is a problem only God can fix. The apostle Paul puts it this way, "having no hope and without God in the world." ALL OF YOUR PROBLEMS, ALL OF THE MISERIES AND HEARTACHE AND SORROWS AND TROUBLES IN THIS LIFE ARISE FROM THIS. And God's Promise to Abraham is ALL ABOUT GOD BRINGING BLESSING TO HUMAN BEINGS WHO WERE ESTRANGED FROM GOD, BY SENDING A SAVIOR. Putting that together, we restate my summary of WHAT MATTHEW 1:1-17 SAYS TO US this way:

***JESUS IS THE WORLD'S RIGHTFUL KING, AND ITS ONLY SAVIOR.***

## **I. Jesus has the Credentials.**

I hope I haven't lost you with this lengthy introduction, but it is my duty to show you the meaning of the text at least enough to show you where the substance of what I preach comes

from. I said a few moments ago that this list, this genealogy is Jesus' pedigree. It shows that He is rightful heir to the throne of Israel.

Now before we look at the question of Kingship and Kings, I want to just ask you to think about two things with me. First, a pedigree is a kind of credential. I could not have been ordained in the PCA without first showing I had graduated from college and seminary, and without having gone through significant tests. My diplomas and my ordination certificate are credentials of sorts—they are a sort of human way of affirming that I am called and qualified to do what I do. Nurses and doctors have to have credentials before they can practice medicine, and something like that is true of teachers, accountants, civil engineers, speech therapists, and other sorts of workers.

THE CREDENTIALS TELL YOU SOMEONE IS LEGITIMATE, QUALIFIED, AND HAS A RIGHT TO DO WHAT THEY DO. AND JESUS HAS CREDENTIALS TO BE KING. I want you think for a moment about some of Jesus' other credentials. We know that in the remainder of this Gospel there is a record of all sorts of miracles, and we know that at the end Matthew tells us that Jesus rose from the dead, and was seen by many witnesses, and commanded his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples. That is the Bible, and many people still say, "SO WHAT?"

If Jesus did rise from the dead, then that means everything. And there is ample evidence for the resurrection, including the continued existence and spread of the Church in the face of persecution and torture that would have stamped it out if there were no truth to what we say. But think with me about the Church, because Jesus' credentials are in the Church.

The world is a dark place. Abortion and infanticide are not new. They were around in those days, and it was common for pagans to leave unwanted babies outdoors to die of exposure or be eaten by animals. But the early Christians rescued those babies, and taught men and women that abortion and infanticide were murder. It was the Church that gave rise to the spread of hospitals and medicine. It was the teaching of the Church that liberated women from being treated as property, as slaves, by their husbands and fathers. Obviously many Christians have fallen short in this, but no other world religion has done this. The same thing is true in regard to slavery. For many centuries, many Christians had a huge blind spot, but it was Christian convictions about the value of a human being that led to the abolition of slavery. It was Christian convictions that gave rise to ideas of liberty, freedom, and limited, democratic government. It was Christian convictions about the orderliness of the world that were the impetus to the advances of science early in the modern era. Finally, there is no other world religion that brings about such transformed lives.

This is a quick, summary list, and obviously I can't take time to develop these ideas. But the fact is that Christianity stands unique among world religions in these things.

THESE THINGS ARE ALL JESUS' CREDENTIALS. THEY ARE ALL EVIDENCES THAT HE IS WHO HE SAID HE WAS. THAT HE IS THE SON OF DAVID, THE SON OF ABRAHAM, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD. BUT WHAT I SAY TO YOU RIGHT NOW IS THIS: THE CREDENTIALS ARE THERE IF YOU WILL GO & LOOK AT THEM. AT THIS POINT MATTHEW HAS ONLY GIVEN ONE PART OF JESUS' CREDENTIALS. THERE ARE OTHERS. IF YOU ARE NOT SURE ABOUT JESUS, WHY WOULD YOU REJECT HIM WITHOUT THOROUGHLY CHECKING IT OUT?

But I spoke of Jesus' credentials specifically saying that He is the rightful king of Israel. But that doesn't seem to have much to do with you and me, does it? Yes, actually it does.

## **II. JESUS IS RIGHTFULLY KING OVER ALL THE WORLD.**

It is not immediately apparent from the text of Matthew 1, but when you look at God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, and ESPECIALLY AT ISRAEL'S THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON IT SUCH AS WE SAW IN PSALM 72, we see that the promise of the Covenant with David is that David's Heir would be KING OVER ALL THE WORLD. David is definitely a type, a prophecy in picture, of Jesus. And He is a picture of Christ IN HIS KINGSHIP IN THAT DAVID SUBJUGATED ALL OF THE SURROUNDING NATIONS UNDER HIS RULE. THAT MEANT BLESSING IF THE PEOPLE EMBRACED ISRAEL'S GOD, AND WE SEE THAT ESPECIALLY WITH DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN. A GOOD NUMBER OF THEM WERE NOT NATIVES OF ISRAEL. BUT IN DAVID THEY SAW JESUS AND BELIEVED, AND BOWED THE KNEE TO ISRAEL'S GOD.

So what does that mean for you and for me? Jesus rose from the dead. He conquered death. Toward the end of Matthew's Gospel we read of Jesus' final appearance to the first disciples, in which He says to them, says, "ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME." That means that there is nothing that is, or will not be, not subject to His rule. Nothing. Nada. Obviously He doesn't rule like an ordinary human government, but that doesn't make His rule any less real. If I fail to pay my taxes or do any of a number of other things, our government will have me arrested, tried, and thrown in Jail. If I keep refusing to submit to Christ's rule, ultimately I will be cast into hell, into the Lake of Fire. But in the meantime Jesus is patient. Yet He rules all things, over the course of human history, over the nations, and over the material and spiritual creation. When it says "He works all things after the counsel of His own will," that working of God's providential government is through Christ. But God deals with us as intelligent moral agents. He gives us commands, and He expects us to repent, believe, submit and obey. Yet we still have a choice. But if we do not yield to His government voluntarily, EVERY KNEE WILL BE FORCED TO BOW. None of those who defy Him will escape.

But is there something good for you in Jesus' kingship? The answer is **yes**, **ABSOLUTELY**. The irony is that submitting to Jesus' Kingship is the path to freedom. Christ's Kingship is liberating. Let me show you that more fully under my Third Point.

## **III. JESUS IS THE WORLD'S [ONLY] SAVIOR**

Matthew calls Jesus the "Son of Abraham." God spoke to Abraham, and promised him that someday a descendant of his would be born who would bring blessing to all the peoples of the world. Now that doesn't mean each and every last individual. And obviously, the Gospel has not reached everywhere yet; and even where it has, many people have rejected Christ. But wherever the Gospel goes, wherever the Kingdom of God goes, wherever the Kingdom of Jesus goes, people are set free.

I mentioned earlier about the 4 women in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew. This is suggestive, but it appears that all 4 of these women were Gentiles, not Jews, in regard to their origins. They became Jews, meaning, they trusted in and confessed the God of Israel as their God. So one thing that is here in a suggestive way in Matthew's Genealogy is this: the fact that God intended to bless all the nations in the Son of Abraham is attested by these 4 Gentile women who were Jesus' earthly ancestors!

Many of you were here a few years ago when my friend visited us from northeast India. His ancestors worshiped spirits, and lived in perpetual warfare with neighboring villages. Life was grim. But the Naga peoples turned *en masse* to Jesus, beginning about 130 years ago. God has set them free. It is amazing how much Christianity has transformed civilization and culture among the Nagas and other tribal groups in Northeast India in a little over a century. Whereas the Nagas were a feared and despised tribal group before this, now they have risen so much that there are many people in various levels of civil government from among the Nagas, doctors, university professors, and various other people who are leading professionals in Indian society. That is only one example.

Some of you who sit here know what it is to be in bondage, and you know God has set you free. Jesus has brought blessing to the world. On the other hand, we see more people in our own formerly Christian land more enslaved to more things than perhaps ever before in the past in America, and that is BECAUSE THEY WILL NOT SUBMIT TO KING JESUS. There is no blessing apart from Him.

On the other hand, when you encounter Jesus, you encounter God. Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." He also said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

SALVATION is what the Bible is all about. Everything that is wrong with the human race is because we are separated from God. Jesus came into the world to do something about that, to cure that problem. The New Testament witness is that He lived a life of moral perfection to please a Holy God, and that He died the death of an evil man, though He himself had done nothing wrong. AND FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM, BELIEVES THAT JESUS WAS HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS, AND BELIEVES THAT JESUS DIED FOR SINNERS, GOD CREDITS HIS PERFECT OBEDIENCE TO THAT PERSON, AND TREATS JESUS' DYING AS THE PUNISHMENT FOR THEIR SIN. THAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF SALVATION, AND IT IS FOUNDATIONAL.

## CONCLUSION:

Matthew is a master in his grasp of the Old Testament, and Matthew's Gospel, time and again, rings the changes on the theme of Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament hopes. We have been looking at Matthew's introduction. The things I have been opening this morning are, to some degree, more present in a suggestive way than in a bold and open and emphatic way. But they are here. And chief among those things is the idea that Jesus is King, not just of Israel, but by implication, King over the whole earth. Matthew has given the genealogy to show that Jesus is indeed the legitimate heir of Israel's throne. He has the credentials. And yes, it is true, this genealogy is only the beginning of these credentials,

these evidences that Jesus is who He said He was. But let me end, then, challenging you. A first century Jew would have known about most of the people in Matthew's genealogy of Christ, and yet might have needed to research the last several generations, those that were not in the canon of the Old Testament. Matthew was intending to show Jesus had the credentials, but also to draw the reader into looking further into the question, "IS this Jesus of Nazareth indeed the Christ, the Savior of Israel?" AND THE SAME CHALLENGE IS OFFERED TO YOU. WHY NOT LOOK FURTHER INTO IT, AND SEE WHAT GOD DOES TO CONFIRM WHAT MATTHEW IS SAYING ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, THE KING?